

Theorem

If energy cannot be created
or destroyed in an isolated system
let's name the system my mouth

& let it speak itself into existence.

No, not like that—this is no original creation
I don't pretend to be a god,
even of my own billowing throat.

I know every sound
that has ever been made is the wind
searching for a body to fill
with a small sky.

The night my grandfather died,
I stood outside beneath a canvas
polluted with light. I found
the closest ocean & walked

into it. I waited until the sky appeared
in the water, I named the sky *mirror*.

I asked it if there is a word
that connects celebration to grief—
& my father appeared. He told me

it's okay to be a season
that rains, to wade in the water
& want to dissolve. He asked
if I could try, anyway,
to find a smile that does not moonlight

as a graveyard. He asked me to leave
more room for joy in my story,
there will always be time
to mourn what vanishes like dust
in the wind

but not all wounds are a garden
that need to be watered. Sometimes
the best way to love

is to collect all the smallest lights
in jars & stack them

into a city gowned in neon,
name it heaven or holy or here.

I say I can't just drag joy
out of the night like a moon
& swallow it. My father shakes

his head, points
to a different night,
a different moon— one that orbits
my tongue & has always been there

even before I had a name for it,
even before there was a sky.

I guess what my father means is joy
cannot be created or destroyed—
it is the wind

searching for a body
& I need to be willing to be contained

in the dust, to hold all parts of myself
ablaze with light.

Portrait of the Las Vegas Strip Ending in Ash

Even on Tuesday evening the florescent lights
grenade the sky all the way down S Las Vegas Boulevard
from Caesar's Palace past the Venetian everything burns
a little brighter in this city

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if Rome had fallen here, this desert
would have made it look like the most miraculous
& inviting smoke. & in that rubble, a mob
of empty palms would clap
then descend to gather
the coins spilling from the wounded oasis

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Vegas is truly a kingdom
of heaven it's filled with people
who line up to gnaw its gates right open
everyone I know who stays
long enough
loses everything

//

don't ask me why
my mother's family chose to grow old here
but we've gathered downtown
I can taste the salt & ash lining my cheeks
as we hike down E Flamingo Road

//

my grandfather walks behind us
to chain smoke in peace
& each light
is a small sun begging
to be undone

//

maybe it's the air downtown
how thick & guttural it's roar is
beneath the lamps
I am also guilty of nothing to
but I admire how he has chosen to die
this way by his own hand
more gray than glamour a slow burn
fuck you to this city wrapped in gold
leaf & extinct empire

//

praise the cigarette, the amber crown
conquering the body that wears it praise the man

who wears the crown between his lips
as his lungs become two urns
carrying what's left of him